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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO  
E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media led with reports of scuffles between settlers and IDF troops who came to evacuate two caravans at the West Bank settlement of Yitzhar, including an incident in which a soldier fired warning shots at settlers as they tried to strip him of his rifle. Ha'aretz cited the belief of the IDF General Staff that the time has come to start cracking down on Israelis who use violence against soldiers and policemen in the territories. Leading media reported that Monday dozens of settlers built protest tents near the Knesset.

This morning, Israel Radio reported that seven Palestinians were killed by a shell fired by an IDF tank in Beit Lahiya near the Erez Crossing, following the launching of a rocket at a bus transporting Israeli children. The radio cited Palestinian claims that five of the slain people were children aged 12 to 17, and IDF allegations that the killed Palestinians were older Hamas militants.

Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli military sources as saying that, thanks to Abdul Qadeer Khan, the chief architect of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, either Syria, Egypt or Saudi Arabia now has the potential to achieve a "significant nuclear leap." The quote comes days after Mossad chief Ephraim Halevy expressed fear that one of those countries might have acquired some kind of nuclear capability via an illicit weapons trafficking network run by Khan.

All media reported that defying condemnation from Hamas and other radical factions in the Gaza Strip, PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas on Monday reiterated a demand for an end to rocket attacks against Israeli targets. Some media said that Abbas's remarks were spurred by a statement made Sunday by Secretary of State Colin Powell that he found Abbas's failure to distance himself from the radical al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades "disturbing." The media also reported that Monday Abbas promised Palestinians refugees that they will be able to return home one day, and that he vowed not to take up arms against militants.

All media reported that right-wing activists are making use of a 1994 interview in which Sharon urged soldiers not to obey orders that go against their conscience. The activists have been distributing a recording of Sharon's remarks to IDF conscripts. Hatzofe reported that Monday the National Religious Party decided to offer Shas and National Union the option to join its efforts against the disengagement plan. Jerusalem Post reported that officials from Pakistan, Yemen, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, all Muslim countries without diplomatic ties with Israel, will arrive by the end of the week to take part in the international team monitoring the PA election. The newspaper quoted Amir Maimon, the Foreign Ministry official in charge of coordination for the election monitors, as saying they will be part of an 80-person team put together by the U.S. National Democratic Institute (NDI), the foreign policy arm of the Democratic Party. Jerusalem Post also cited an IDF denial of Palestinian claims that Rizik Ziad Musleh, a high school student campaigning for Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, a candidate in the upcoming PA chairmanship elections, was killed by soldiers last Thursday near Rafah.

Turkish FM Abdullah Gul was quoted as saying Monday in an interview with Ha'aretz that Turkey believes that Syria is serious about making peace with Israel, and that that Ankara hopes to receive a positive response from Jerusalem to the message Gul is bringing with him from Damascus.

Yediot reported that Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the UN, has told a Belgian Senate delegation that Sharon is a murderer. The newspaper reported that the Foreign Ministry has instructed the Israeli Representative to the UN to present a strong protest to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and that it also instructed the U.S. Embassy in Washington to raise the issue with the State Department.

Yediot cited the GOI's confirmation that FM Silvan Shalom will visit Jordan this month. Yediot quoted the Jordanian newspaper Al-Arab Al-Yawm as saying Sunday that during Shalom's visit, Israel will release several Jordanian prisoners.

Yediot reported that, following the Iranian nuclear threat and concerns about world terror, the Mossad has requested additional funding from the Knesset's secret services subcommittee.

Ha'aretz reported that the Foreign Ministry has opened a bank account for private contributions for the victims of the South Asian tsunami, and that it is considering sending around 20 mobile water purifiers to the countries that were hit by the disaster. Leading media reported that IsraAid, a coordinating body of Jewish organizations worldwide and NGOs based in Israel, is spearheading the Israel Campaign For Southeast Asia Disaster, a global Jewish relief campaign to aid the victims of the disaster.

Yediot and Maariv cited the results of a poll conducted in the UK by the British newspaper The Daily Telegraph: -"Which country do you hate most?" Israel: 37 percent of respondents; India: 29 percent; Egypt and China: 24 percent. (Cited in Maariv.) -Respondents found the most dangerous country to be: U.S.: 37 percent; Israel: 33 percent; Egypt: 21 percent. (Cited in Yediot.)

Jerusalem Post cited a street survey conducted in Orlando, FL, by the International Society for Sephardic Progress: 63 percent of respondents did not know what Auschwitz-Birkenau was.

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Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Columnist Avraham Tirosh wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "Monday's struggle [at the West Bank settlement of Yitzhar], from the perspective of the settlers ... was not over ... two patently illegal trailers.... Kingdoms have already fallen because of civil war."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Israel must ... immediately take steps that will prove ... that it truly intends the Palestinian Authority election to be free and open to all."

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote in Maariv: "Mahmoud Abbas ... is dancing with the wolves.... The thinking on the worst-case scenario should already have been done. Withdrawal must be done with eyes wide open."

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "[In both Iraq and the Palestinian Authority], existing ideologies and political structures are in conflict with democratic processes, while the big problems and difficult choices remain to be confronted after Election Day."

Liberal columnist B. Michael wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "What to do, disengagement

is a typical Sharon bluff. There indeed is no way but to support it, be it only in order to expose the cheat. But there's no reason to enthuse about it."

Block Quotes:

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I. "Blood Is Going To Be Spilled"

Columnist Avraham Tirosh wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (January 4): "Let it be clear, Monday's struggle [at the West Bank settlement of Yitzhar], from the perspective of the settlers who clashed with the police and the soldiers, was not over those two patently illegal trailers stuck out there on some desolate hilltop. It was over the settlements in the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria. And it sent a message that is unequivocal, terrible and causes despair: when the time comes for the big evacuation, if we get there, there is going to be gunfire, blood is going to be spilled, and all the institutions in Israel will collapse. Kingdoms have already fallen because of civil war. And, terrifyingly enough, there isn't anyone who is capable of preventing it. Maybe just that old rabbi [United Torah Judaism party mentor Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv], who is shut in his house in Jerusalem right now, deliberating whether to breathe life into the Sharon government and the disengagement plan, or to force early elections that will delay and may even dash the big evacuation and, by so doing, the plague of fire and blood that threatens us."

II. "Free and Open to All"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (January 4): "Five days before the Palestinian Authority's election day, one gets the impression that Israel is uncertain that this is truly its heart's desire.... The elections, say the Palestinians, with the backing of international monitors, must be free in the fullest sense of the word. What such freedom means is that every person must be able to come to the polls without fear or pressure in order to exercise his right to vote. But it is doubtful that Palestinians fearful of IDF gunfire or lengthy delays at checkpoints will want to leave their houses to participate in the elections. Israel ought to have a keen interest in the political legitimacy that Abu Mazen is seeking.... Those who are demanding a new diplomatic program from the Palestinians -- an end to incitement and the disarming of the militias and gangs -- should know that this cannot be achieved via a Palestinian leadership that lacks public support. To achieve this result, Israel must cease the political miserliness that has characterized it to date and immediately take steps that will prove -- not only to the Palestinians, but also to the Israeli public and international observers -- that it truly intends the Palestinian Authority election to be free and open to all."

III. "Dancing With Wolves"

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote in Maariv (January 4): "Mahmoud Abbas -- a.k.a. Abu Mazen -- is dancing with the wolves. He fraternizes with Hamas, snuggles up to Islamic Jihad and promises the terrorists that he will not disarm them. Just the opposite, he says he will protect them. Israel is giving him credit, which boils down only to election PR. When the polls close on January 9, his romance with terror is meant to come to an end.... After all, the candidate for the Palestinian Authority leadership rejected the armed conflict at the beginning of the Intifada in 2000. We have to hope. But we also have to ask ourselves what will happen if this doesn't take place. Abu Mazen has a biography of weakness in the face of Palestinian terror.... In the lack of an agreement with Abu Mazen and with terror continuing, the IDF will not be able to withdraw from the Gaza Strip along with the settlers.... To evacuate Gush Katif under fire, Israel must announce to itself that the Gush Katif bloc is more of a liability than an asset. Will a Likud-headed government, even one that has already gone a long and dramatic way from what Sharon promised in the elections to what he is proposing now, be capable of doing this? It is too early to know. The chances are still good that Abu Mazen will come to his senses and distance himself from terror after the Palestinian polling booths close. An orderly transfer of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority serves the interests of all sides, except for the terrorists. But when Sharon brings the issue of disengagement to his cabinet this month for a decision, the thinking on the worst-case scenario should already have been done. Withdrawal must be done with eyes wide open."

#### IV. "Two Arab Elections"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (January 4): "Strange but revealing: the two fairest elections in Arab history are about to be held due only to foreign pressure and presence. They also say a great deal about the direction of Arab politics and likely developments during 2005. In both cases the fact that Iraqi and Palestinian leaders will be determined via a ballot box is encouraging, signaling a growing interest in democracy, human rights, and moderation.... [Still,] the [Iraqi] election may lay the basis for a civil war, or at least heightened ethnic antagonism and strife. The Palestinian situation is somewhat parallel. Fatah is the dominant party and Abu Mazen will be elected because he is its candidate. That powerful (though undisciplined) organization is still in the hands of hard-liners, who are not ready for a real peace with Israel, or for genuine democracy. At the same time, Fatah is ready to make deals with other forces -- its own young insurgents and Hamas -- that will block any real change or hopes for peace.... The possibility of a popular regime exists in both cases, as well as a stable government in Iraq and a cease-fire for the Palestinians. Yet existing ideologies and political structures are in conflict with democratic processes, while the big problems and difficult choices remain to be confronted after Election Day."

#### IV. "Sharon Is Already Reaping Rewards"

Liberal columnist B. Michael wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 4): "Those who have refused to understand by themselves the purpose of the disengagement [plan] received another chance to do so. In an interview granted by Atty. [Dov] Weisglass to Ha'aretz, he almost childishly detailed with frankness and pride the truth hiding behind the Sharon plan.... Sharon's true inclination can be uncovered when one compares the various aspects of his activity concerning disengagement. 'Activity' in the full meaning of the word is taking place in the West Bank: bulldozers are crushing, trees are being uprooted, fences are jumped over, houses are being built, roads are being paved, millions of shekels are being buried among the rocks. On the other hand, regarding disengagement, Sharon has (so far) taken care of its verbal ... part.... No budget allocated to the settlements has been cut.... What to do, disengagement is a typical Sharon bluff. There indeed is no way but to support it, be it only in order to expose the cheat. But there's no reason to enthuse about it. However, God willing -- or God forbid -- should it be implemented, one wouldn't know whether it would then cause even greater harm."

KURTZER